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CYBERSTATION — Carl Malamud, founder and manager of Internet Multicasting Service, talks on the phone in his studio Friday in Washington. In the future, Malamud's compnay may use the Internet computer network to broadcast live talk sessions by President Clinton or any other leader to thousands or even millions of people around the globe.

(AP photo)

Cyberstation expands communications

By DAVID BRISCOE
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Call it the ultimate conference call.

President Clinton could one day sit at a White House microphone and computer, linked to thousands of people across the globe, each also sitting at a personal computer and able to talk back.

Welcome to Internet Talk Radio, the world of the cyberstation.

Last month, Vice President Al Gore provided a peek at the futuristic communications network during a speech at the National Press Club. His words were sent instantaneously via computer around the world by the Internet Multicasting Service, operator of the only existing cyberstation.

The system can transmit typed words, pictures and sound back and forth through an ever-growing web of networks that links more than 20 million people at home, office and school computers around the world.

"We've turned every user into a radio station," said the Internet station's founder and manager, Carl Malamud, a computer network builder and author.

Malamud said he has about 100,000 users of his non-profit station and a potential for millions. Internet Talk Radio is financed by Sun Microsystems, O'Reilly & Associates, UUNET Technologies and other contributors.

His six-month-old interactive cyberstation, creating digital radio files, operates in "cyberspace," a word coined to describe computer communities of people in more than 150 countries who socialize, play games and do business online.

Computer hackers in Britain, Germany, Japan, Israel and across the United States were listening to Gore on Dec. 21. More than 200 Internet users fired off electronic mail questions to the vice president, many while his speech was still under way.

With some enhancement, but still using today's technology, the questioners could have talked live over the National Press Club's public address system during a question and answer session. And there are even ways to keep everyone from talking at the same time and to allow a monitor to converse privately with members of the worldwide audience without interrupting the speaker.

The primary appeal of Internet radio now is for computer engineers working to develop the technology. But huge talk-back audiences could quickly emerge as the cost of computer equipment declines and technology continues to improve.

In 1994, Malamud intends to file on his Internet system all National Press Club luncheon speeches, which include top U.S. officials, visiting heads of states and a wide range of world figures.

The station also will feature a recording of T. S. Eliot reading "The Wasteland" and hundreds of other excerpts from Harper Collins audio books, a regular talk show on computer topics called "Geek of the Week," a handful of public radio shows, and a Public Broadcasting System weekly TV program, "Computer Chronicles."

For a charge, any computer user with a modem can now hook into one of several services that tie into the Internet. To get Talk Radio's files to play through a home computer requires a sound card and speakers such as those that come with multimedia kits.